

SFF milks dairy course down to the last drop

A healthy dairy industry is useless without healthy families to run it.

Which is why, six years after it began; Sustainable Dairy Farm Families is back in the field and getting its original participants back on track.

On March 3 it staged the first of a series of follow-up workshops for those who took part in the 2005-07 programs.

There will be further workshops in Warrnambool on April 5, Cobden, April 6 and Colac, April 7 funded by the Geoffrey Gardiner Foundation and Colac Community Enterprise.

National Centre for Farmer Health director Sue Brumby says the follow-up workshops will benefit participants, measuring how far they have come since 2005, and the program itself by showing what success it has had.

Associate clinical professor Brumby says there is no doubt individuals and families who took part in the pilot programs are the better for it.

She says the 2011 workshops include sessions on agricultural chemicals and respiratory health to complement the core health assessments.

“Dairying has some very unique demands which set it apart from a lot of agriculture, not the least just the milking has to be managed twice a day, every day of the week,” she says.

“This workshop ensures those demands – both lifestyle and the work environment – can be successfully managed.”

United Dairy Farmers of Victoria president Chris Griffin took part in the inaugural course and says it helped change his life.

Chris says it made him more conscious of diet, forcing him to “look at the side of the side of the box instead of the pretty pictures on the front”.

He says he now avoids high sugar and fatty foods but in his current role knows he is letting himself down on aerobic exercise.

“I am spending too much time on my backside at a desk, which is why the follow-up was so valuable, it keeps you focused,” Chris says.

“I encourage everyone who took part in the first program to stay involved, and when the next courses come up, urge all dairy farmers to take them on,” he says.

Bessiebelle dairy farmers Naomi and John Pye both joined the Sustainable Dairy Farm Families course in 2005.

Naomi says what really worked for her was the two of them doing it together.

She says it gave them the chance to talk about it themselves, with both knowing what the key messages and benefits were.

“In the back of your mind you sort of know many of these things, but Sustainable Dairy Farm Families keeps you focused,” Naomi says.

“Chocolate biscuits are now a treat, not a daily option, and I do a lot more walking than I did while John went back to competition tennis after a 25-year break,” she says.

“And I know he is eating healthy meals because I am doing the cooking.”

Terang’s Barbara Collins says getting both partners in a dairy business to a course at the same time can be difficult.

But she says she valued her participation.

“It built a lot of awareness. The stats about the gulf between health services in the country and city were amazing,” Barbara says.

“Which makes it even more important for people on farms to stay aware of their own health and wellbeing to ensure they are in the best possible condition,” she says.

“I know I am going to the doctor more often, and although my husband can be traditional with his ‘she’ll be right’ attitude he is more open to getting help now.

“The follow-up was so good. I really enjoyed and I would say 100 pc of the people in Melbourne on March 3 agreed it was essential.”

Further details are available from (Sue Brumby 0355518460)